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SOME TRAITS OF JUDGE SILAS L. BRYAN FATHER OF HON. WILLIAM J. BRYAN.

A LAWYER OF ABILITY, HE HAD SOME MARKED CHARACTERISTICS.

(By Rufus Cope in *New York Tribune*, April, 1900.)

Combining the accomplishments of a popular orator with certain traits of character that command the confidence and loyalty of his followers, W. J. Bryan is an interesting personality, but Mr. Bryan's chief characteristics are inherited traits that were even more manifest in his father, the somewhat eccentric Judge Silas L. Bryan of Salem, Ill., than in the son.

Judge Bryan was a religious man, genuinely religious, and always at 12:00 o'clock each day, no matter where he might be, he bowed his head and offered up a short silent prayer, but so unostentatiously as to be observed by none except those who were aware of the habit and took notice. At least, such was the common report among members of the bar, though I never made an observation to verify this common understanding, which I never heard called in question.

He was a trial lawyer of recognized ability, who was much addicted to quoting the scriptures in his arguments to the jury, and was accustomed to indulge in extravagant encomiums on the virtues of his own clients. On one occasion, when a jury was deliberating on the penalty they should pronounce against a defendant whom they had found guilty of murder, and on whose virtues Bryan had dwelt at some length, one of the jury remarked: "Well, if he's as good a man as that old bald-headed lawyer says he is, the sooner we give him a hist to the next world, the better," and they decided to give him a "hist."

Judge Bryan was zealously loyal to his clients, never exacting as to payment of fees, and always extremely moderate in his charges. Once he was called to Mount Vernon, in Jefferson County, to try a case for an old friend who had special confidence in his integrity. As there was no railroad then connecting Salem and Mount Vernon, Bryan made the trip in his own vehicle, an antiquated buggy that had an origin coeval with the hat he wore. At Mount Vernon he lodged at his friend's

house until the case had been tried. When about to depart, his client, pleased with the result of the trial and desiring to requite his services, inquired what the charges were: "Oh, nothing," said Bryan, "nothing at all. I've had a good time; there's no charge at all." "But I wish to pay you," said his client. "I don't want a man to work for me for nothing."

"Well," said Bryan, "I've noticed a pet coon around here, and I thought it would be a nice plaything for my boys. If you'll let me have that coon, we'll call it square."

The judge got the coon, but would accept nothing more. One end of a long chain was fastened about the coon's neck, the other was attached to the buggy seat, and the coon was put in behind. When well on his way, the judge looked around to see how the coon was coming on, but the coon was not in sight. When found, it was hanging by the chain at the back of the buggy, but the coon was dead.

Judge Bryan was a man of moral rectitude, scrupulous as to his word, conscientious and just, but artful. As a judge, his aim was to do what he conceived to be equitable and just to all parties; and a good many times he disagreed with the Supreme Court. He always entertained an ambition to represent his district in congress, and at last received the nomination of his party. He made an earnest canvass but was not elected. At the same time, Emmet Merritt (better known in Springfield and southern Illinois as Tom Merritt—his full name being Thomas Emmet Merritt), was a candidate for the Legislature. One day, after Merritt had returned from a canvass in the country in the interest of the ticket, he was giving the judge an account of the political situation as he had found it.

Among others on whom he had called, was Mr. D—, a member of Bryan's church and an old Democratic standby. Merritt spoke of D—to Bryan.

"Good man, good man," said Bryan.

"But," said Emmet, who was a great stutterer, "he says h-he w-won't v-vote for me."

Bryan—Won't vote for you? Why won't he vote for you?

Merritt—B-b-because he says I d-d-drink too much w-w-whiskey.

Bryan—Sorry, very sorry; but you know, Emmet, I've often admonished you about that. You ought to quit drinking; you really ought. You see now how you lose the confidence of good people. There's not only D-, but he may influence a dozen others.

Merritt—And he says he isn't going to vote for H—.

Bryan—Won't vote for H—? Well, really I'm sorry to hear that. What objection does he have to H—?

Merritt—Why, he says he d-d-din't like the way H— did when he was in office before. He says he d-d-don't believe that H— is honest.

Bryan—It's too bad. But we can't blame him very much. We must admit that things didn't look just right. People can't be too careful about their conduct, Emmet, if they are to expect the support of honest, God-fearing people.

Merritt—B-b-but he says he a-a-ain't going to v-v-vote for you.

Bryan—Not vote for me? Why, what's got into the man? What's his objection to me?

Merritt—W-w-why, he says you're a d-d-d—d old h-h-hypocrite.

Bryan—The ungrateful scoundrel! Well, its lucky. He doesn't amount to much anyway. He won't control any vote but his own. But, the infernal scalawag! I'm astonished, Emmet, I'm astonished!

One day, Merritt, who was a lawyer, was arguing before Bryan some legal proposition, which Bryan decided against him. But Merritt, not satisfied, kept on talking. Bryan, however, was not a judge to reverse his own rulings. Rapping smartly on his desk, he said: "Emmet, what's the use of pounding on the log after the coon's gone?"

* Silas Lillard Bryan was born in Culpepper County, Va., November 4, 1822; was left an orphan at an early age and in 1840, he came west, at first living with a brother at Troy, Mo. In 1841, he came to Marion County, Ills. In 1845 he entered McKendree College at Lebanon, Ills., from which institution he graduated in 1849. He settled at Salem, Ills., where he practiced law. In 1852, he was elected as a Democrat to the State Senate and served for eight years. In 1861, he was elected a judge of the Second Judicial Circuit, and served two terms (to 1873). He was a delegate to the Constitutional Convention of the State, 1869-1870, the convention which framed the present Constitution of the State. In 1872, he supported Horace Greeley for President of the United States and was a candidate for congress from his district on the Greeley ticket but was defeated. He died at Salem, Ills., March 30, 1880.